

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

The text of all pending claims (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (Currently Amended) A transaction allocation apparatus that selects an operator, from among a plurality of operators, to process a transaction received from a customer and allocates the transaction to the operator selected, the transaction allocation apparatus comprising:

a storing unit that stores status information that is information relating to whether each of the operators is engaged in processing of a transaction or standby at this time;

a standby state deciding unit that decides, based on the status information, which operators are standby at the time ~~the~~ a new transaction is received from the customer;

a standby time estimating unit that estimates, ~~while~~ when it is decided that ~~no~~ none of the operator is operators are standby, based on the status information, a plurality of standby time for each operator that times each of which is a time after which ~~the~~ showing when each of the operator operators is going to become standby again; and

an operator selecting unit that selects, before any of the operators becomes standby, an operator ~~based on a~~ whose length of the standby time estimated is smaller than a predetermined constant ~~for each operator~~ as the an operator who can be going to process the new transaction.

2. (Previously Presented) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

the storing unit stores an estimate time for each operator, which is a time taken by the corresponding operator to process the transaction the operator is processing at this time, and also stores a start time, which is a time at which the operator has started the processing of the transaction the operator is processing at this time, and

the standby time estimating unit estimates the standby time by subtracting a current time from a sum of the start time and the estimate time.

3. (Previously Presented) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

the operator selecting unit selects an operator with shortest standby time as the operator to process the transaction.

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

a canceling unit that cancels allocation of the new transaction to the operator selected if the operator selected does not start processing the new transaction within a predetermined time, wherein

the standby state deciding unit repeats the decision on which operators are standby when the allocation of the new transaction is canceled.

6. (Original) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

the transactions are received via any one of telephone, chat, and e-mail,

the storing unit stores the status information separately for the transactions received via the telephone, chat, and e-mail, and

the standby state deciding unit performs the decision on which operators are standby separately for the transactions received via the telephone, chat, and e-mail based on the respective status information.

7. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

a skill level storing unit that stores a skill level of each operator that is an expertise of the operator in processing transactions; and

an extracting unit that extracts, when the new transaction is received, operators whose skill levels exceed the skill levels required to process the new transaction based on the skill levels stored, wherein

the standby state deciding unit performs the decision on which operators are standby from among the operators extracted by the extracting unit.

8. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 7, further comprising:

a relaxed candidate extracting unit that relaxes the skill level required to process the new transaction, if the standby state deciding unit has decided that ~~no~~ none of the operator operators extracted are is standby, and repeats the extraction of operators, wherein

the standby state deciding unit performs the decision on which operators are standby from among the operators extracted by the relaxed candidate extracting unit.

9. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 7, wherein

the operator selecting unit selects an operator whose skill level exceeds the skill level required to process the new transaction by minimum as the operator to process the transaction, from among operators with standby times not more than a predetermined ~~third~~ time.

10. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation apparatus according to claim 8, wherein

the operator selecting unit selects an operator whose skill level exceeds the skill level relaxed by minimum as the operator to process the new transaction, from among operators with standby times not more than a predetermined fourth time.

11. (Currently Amended) A transaction allocation method of selecting an operator, from among a plurality of operators to process a transaction received from a customer and allocating the transaction to the selected operator, the transaction allocation method comprising:

storing status information that is information relating to whether each of the operators is engaged in processing of a transaction or standby at this time;

deciding, based on the status information, which operators are standby at the time the transaction is received from the customer;

estimating, based on the status information, a plurality of standby-time times ~~for each operator that each of which~~ is a time ~~after which the operator~~ showing when each of the operators is going to become standby again, ~~while~~ when it is decided at the deciding that ~~no operator~~ none of the operators are is standby; and

selecting, before any of the operators becomes standby, an operator ~~based on a~~ whose length of the standby time estimated is smaller than a predetermined constant for each operator as the an operator who can be going to process the new transaction.

12. (Previously Presented) The transaction allocation method according to claim 11, wherein

the storing includes storing an estimated time for each operator, which is a time taken by the corresponding operator to process the transaction the operator is processing at this time, and also storing a start time, which is a time at which the operator has started processing of the transaction the operator is processing at this time, and

the estimating estimates the standby time by subtracting a current time from a sum of the start time and the estimate time.

13. (Previously Presented) The transaction allocation method according to claim 11, wherein

the selecting includes selecting an operator with estimated shortest standby time as the operator to process the transaction.

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation method according to claim 11, further comprising:

canceled the allocation of the new transaction to the operator selected, if the operator selected does not start the processing the new transaction within a predetermined time, wherein

the deciding includes repeating the decision on which operators are standby when the allocation of the new transaction is canceled.

16. (Original) The transaction allocation method according to claim 11, wherein

the transaction are received via any one of a telephone, chat, and e-mail,

the storing includes storing the status information separately for the transactions received via the telephone, chat, and e-mail, and

the deciding includes performing the decision on which operators are standby separately for the transactions received via the telephone, chat, and e-mail based on the respective status information.

17. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation method according to claim 11, further comprising:

storing a skill level of each operator that is an expertise of the operator in processing transactions; and

extracting, when the new transaction is received, operators whose skill levels exceed the skill levels required to process the new transaction based on the skill levels stored, wherein the deciding includes performing the decision on which operators are standby from among the operators extracted.

18. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation method according to claim 17, further comprising:

relaxing the skill level required to process the new transaction, if it is decided at the deciding that ~~no operator~~ none of the operators extracted are standby, wherein

the extracting includes extracting operators whose skill levels exceed the skill levels relaxed, and

the deciding ~~step~~ includes performing the decision on which operators are standby from among the operators extracted after the skill levels were relaxed.

19. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation method according to claim 17, wherein

the selecting includes selecting an operator whose skill level exceeds the skill level required to process the new transaction by minimum as the operator to process the transaction, from among operators with estimated standby times not more than a predetermined time.

20. (Currently Amended) The transaction allocation method according to claim 18, wherein the selecting includes selecting an operator whose skill level exceeds the skill level relaxed by minimum as the operator to process the new transaction, from among operators with estimated standby times not more than a predetermined time.

21. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium recording a computer program that makes a computer execute a transaction allocation method of selecting an operator, from among a plurality of operators to process a transaction received from a customer and allocating the transaction to the selected operator, the computer program including instruction to realize:

storing status information that is information relating to whether each of the operators is engaged in processing of a transaction or standby at this time;

deciding, based on the status information, which operators are standby at the time ~~the~~ a new transaction is received from the customer;

estimating, based on the status information, a plurality of standby time for each operator ~~that times each of which~~ is a time ~~after which the operator~~ showing when each of the operators is going to become standby again, ~~while when~~ it is decided at the deciding that ~~no operator~~ none of the operators are standby; and

selecting, before any of the operators becomes standby, an operator ~~based on a~~ whose length of the standby time estimated is smaller than a predetermined constant for each operator ~~as the~~ an operator who can be going to process the new transaction.

22. (Previously Presented) The computer readable medium according to claim 21, wherein

the storing includes storing estimate time for each operator, which is a time taken by the corresponding operator to process the transaction the operator is processing at this time, and also storing a start time, which is a time at which the operator has started processing of the transaction the operator is processing at this time, and

the estimating estimates the standby time by subtracting a current time from a sum of the start time and the estimate time.

23. (Previously Presented) The computer readable medium according to claim 21, wherein the selecting includes selecting an operator with estimated shortest standby time as the operator to process the transaction.

24. (Cancelled)

25. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium according to claim 21, the computer program further including instruction to realize:

canceled the allocation of the new transaction to the operator selected, if the operator selected does not start the processing the new transaction within a predetermined time, wherein

the deciding includes repeating the decision on which operators are standby when the allocation of the new transaction is canceled.

26. (Previously Presented) The computer readable medium according to claim 21, wherein

the transaction are received via any one of a telephone, chat, and e-mail,

the storing includes storing the status information separately for the transactions received via the telephone, chat, and e-mail, and

the deciding includes performing the decision on which operators are standby separately for the transactions received via the telephone, chat, and e-mail based on the respective status information.

27. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium according to claim 21, the computer program further including instruction to realize:

storing a skill level of each operator that is an expertise of the operator in processing transactions; and

extracting, when the new transaction is received, operators whose skill levels exceed the skill levels required to process the new transaction based on the skill levels stored, wherein

the deciding includes performing the decision on which operators are standby from among the operators extracted.

28. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

estimating completion times for operators when each of the operators are busy with a current transaction; and

selecting, before any of the operators becomes available, an operator as the operator to process a new transaction based on the completion times.